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ABSTRACT

In 1963, the National Child Labor Committee established the National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children (NCEMC) to give new impetus to its work with these children. The over 300,000 migrant children suffered from educational deprivation in the home, inadequate health care, poor housing, and a lack of desirable learning situations. Further deprived by language barriers and rigid grade placement, these children benefited little from programs that concentrated on remedial work without diagnosis of problems. The NCEMC recommended a national plan for migrant child education. This plan should include: (1) revisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Migrant Amendment, that would cover identification of migrant children, fund allocation, adequate research and evaluation, and program coordination; (2) emphasis on innovative teaching methods and a national health program; (3) reorganization of migrant school programs; (4) a national teacher recruitment program; and (5) immediate implementation of the recommendations of the Report of the President's Commission on Rural Poverty. The report also included recommendations for the improvement of the lives of migrant workers in general. (KM)

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NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON THE EDUCATION OF MIGRANT CHILDREN

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A POLICY STATEMENT
on
The Education of Children of Migrant Farm Workers

Adopted by the Advisory Committee
June 6, 1968

No other children in the United States are so sorely neglected as the children of migrant farm workers. Suffering all the ills of the impoverished--hunger, congested housing, insufficient clothing, little opportunity for an education--they are, in addition, subjected to exploitative and damaging child labor and to endless cycles of migration from one community to another.

Over the years one of the strongest defenders of migrant children against this exploitative child labor and deprivation has been the National Child Labor Committee. As a continuation of its more than 50 years of concern for migrant children, the Committee established the National Committee on the Education of Migrant Children in 1963 to give new impetus to its work with these children. The new Committee was founded on the premise that we must educate the children of migrant farm workers if we are to break the cycle of poverty in which they have lived for generations. Only through an improved opportunity for education did the Committee believe it would be possible for these children to develop to their full individual potential.

The problem of educating over 300,000 migrant children defies description. Many of these children grow up in homes without magazines, books, pictures or a telephone, where parents' conversation provides little stimulation for development of an adequate vocabulary.

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Furthermore, the migrant child suffers from a wide variety of health problems which in turn affect his ability to make progress in school. He may have decayed teeth, poor hearing, uncorrected visual defects, intestinal disturbances and malnutrition, if not real and actual hunger. He may never have visited a dentist and rarely a doctor. His immunizations are likely to have been on a hit or miss basis without adequate records.

In many instances clothing and shoes are needed to make school attendance possible.

Added to all of this is poor housing with little or no privacy and no place to study at home. Although many parents seem to be aware that a good education is essential, they are rarely able to encourage or help the child in his efforts. Concerned always with making ends meet and getting enough food for the family, there is little energy left for attention to other matters.

Despite such deprivation, experience has repeatedly shown that the migrant child when placed in a good learning situation can and does learn. In fact, some school reports show phenomenal progress. But unfortunately the migrant child is frequently denied access to desirable learning situations because schools in the small towns or rural areas in which he is likely to live, either while at home base or "on the season," are frequently the least capable of coping with the special needs of the individual migrant child.

Some of the special educational problems of the migrant child center around his inability to communicate. The Spanish-speaking child may be equally as deficient in expressing himself in either Spanish or English as the Negro or Anglo migrant child is in his own language. While he may have developed certain skills because of his work and living experience, the school frequently does not provide ways in which he can demonstrate what he does know. All too often classwork is textbook rather than life experience-centered, further handicapping these children.

The rigid grade placement and record-keeping systems further handicap the migrant child who arrives in a new school without records or any real knowledge of his placement in previous schools. As he reaches the upper grades, his age/grade retardation becomes more marked and his self-image more damaged.

Furthermore, many of the current efforts being made to provide for the education of migrant children are falling far short of their needs. Some schools are concentrating on enrichment programs to the neglect of academic work and vice versa. Too many classrooms are giving special attention to remedial work without proper diagnosis of problems. In far too many situations the new programs are doing little more than provide more of the same uninspired teaching.

The NCEMC recognizes that some gains have been made in respect to some of these problems. Legislation, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Economic Opportunity Act and the Migrant Health Act, as well as the concern of non-governmental

agencies and community groups have contributed to these improvements. However, we are well aware that all of these problems continue to exist for most migrant children and their families. We cannot afford to have our consciences lulled by the idea that present efforts are adequate.

National Program Recommendations

Therefore the NCEMC recognizes its continuing responsibility to seek improved educational opportunity for all migrant children. It calls on the educational institutions of the nation to put forth added effort to identify and solve the educational problems of migrant children.

We believe that a national policy and plan for the education of migrant children must be developed. It must be more comprehensive in scope than anything heretofore conceived. Such a policy and plan must recognize that the problem is an interstate and nationwide one requiring, therefore, a national approach to its solution. Only such an approach, we believe, can improve significantly the long-range chances of the migrant child to be educated effectively. This national plan should include:

1. Revisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, Migrant Amendment, as well as changes in its administrative procedures. The ESEA program for migrants, as presently structured, does not appear to be developing a sufficient number of innovative and meaningful programs. It has not provided for essential leadership in national planning nor for adequate consultative or evaluative services. Changes should be made which would require:

    a. More accurate identification of migrant children in order to provide a more equitable basis for the allocation of funds.

    b. Concentration of funds in areas of greatest need and in areas capable of providing the greatest continuity of services.

    c. Availability of funds to public and private agencies which demonstrate capability for meaningful and innovative programming and which can experiment with development of new models such as boarding schools, foster homes, and other comprehensive care for those children whose parents' work patterns are obstacles to the education of their children.

d. Programs to be limited enough in scope to provide significant and individualized help to each child involved.

e. Establishment of adequate research and evaluation facilities at the national level. These may be lodged in an independent agency or university.

f. Immediate provision for adequate monitoring of Federally-funded migrant education projects.

g. Immediate provision for top quality consultation service to all ESEA Migrant Amendment programs.

h. Strengthening, through the U.S. Office of Education, the means for coordination of activities between states by the establishment of a national arrangement for dissemination of information and for supervision which would be free of any one state's control.

2. Emphasis on the following program areas:

a. Innovative methods such as--multi-age grouping, ungraded classes, team teaching, individualized instruction, experience-centered curriculum, mini-projects, overnight and day camps, and pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs. ESEA, Title III funds should be more widely used to provide innovative programs for migrant children.

b. Continuing emphasis in the upper grades on physical learning methods. These may include work-study programs beginning at the Junior High level.

c. A plan for high school studies which would enable the migrant child to complete units of work at the secondary level despite late enrollment or early withdrawal. The present system prohibits many migrant children from completing enough credits for graduation. Plans for secondary studies are imperative since we may expect large numbers of migrant children to be ready for high school in three to five years if present efforts at the elementary level are effective.

d. A national program of medical, dental and food services which would eliminate present local and state discrepancies in these services and which would be a cooperative effort of all agencies in the community. NCEMC believes every migrant child, because of his poverty status, should be given, free of charge, breakfast and lunch. He should have at least a minimum of routine dental and

medical examinations and such follow-up and emergency services as required by good health standards. Clothing should also be made available as needed.

3. Reorganization of migrant school programs to:

   a. Eliminate all segregated school facilities whether on the basis of race or migrant vs. non-migrant except where and as long as temporary separation is required for language or other special instructions.

   b. Include in all programs pre-school or Head Start facilities with appropriate care before and after school hours for all children.

   c. Immediately eliminate all holding classrooms or similar arrangements used with migrant children which prohibit them from having the same opportunity for significant educational experiences from the first day of enrollment as any other child.

   d. Provide alternatives to standardized tests and records by developing better and more suitable techniques for pupil evaluation and placement.

4. A national program for recruitment of competent teachers and school administrators who would receive training to develop effective programs for migrant children. This training should include areas such as:

   a. Techniques for rapid evaluation and placement of children,

   b. Innovative approaches to teaching and learning,

   c. Understanding the migrant child and

   d. Cooperation with health, welfare and other agencies to provide needed services for children and their families.

5. The immediate implementation of the recommendations on migrant education of the Report of the President's Commission on Rural Poverty. The Commission recommends--"that Federal grants be expanded for the education of migrant children," and "that adult education programs be coupled with education programs for children of migrant workers on an expanded scale." (Commission Report, p. 50.)

We would be remiss if we did not recognize that just as fundamental as changes in the educational program are the changes needed in the farm labor system which creates the education problems for children affected by the system. We, therefore, call for the following legislation and community action which will greatly improve the lives of migrant workers:

1. A plan for the effective recruitment and utilization of domestic farm workers both seasonal and migrant.

2. An increase in the minimum wage for farm workers and the extension of coverage to larger numbers of these workers.

3. The protection of the children of migrant workers by extension of the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act to prohibit all children under the age of 14 from working in agriculture, both during and outside of school hours, except on their parents' farm. While their parents work, provision should be made for adequate care and protection of all children in situations affording formal and informal learning opportunities.

4. The extension of the rights of collective bargaining to all workers in agriculture.

5. A Federal housing code for migrant camps to set a minimum standard for all states and consistent enforcement of such a code.

6. The extension to all migrant workers, by the community in which they are employed, of all community services available to their own residents, including health, welfare and recreation facilities.

The alternative to such a program is a growing number of young men and women on the poverty rolls of our nation. In an era when jobs are demanding more and better skills, there is no place for the person without an appropriate education.

At the present time only a minute number of migrant children complete any high school work. We are therefore currently sending tens of thousands of 14-16 year old migrant youth into the job market each year, totally unprepared for anything except the fewer and fewer jobs in seasonal farm labor.

So long as we do not seek creative ways to end this waste of human resources, we cannot eliminate poverty. To end this waste will be costly both in terms of government spending and in expenditures on the part of employers who must provide better wages and living

conditions. It will be costly to us as citizens who may pay higher taxes and higher prices for food. It will be costly to communities who must provide added facilities and services in their education, health and welfare institutions. But we cannot afford to stop where we are. This blight in our countryside must be ended. It must be ended now!